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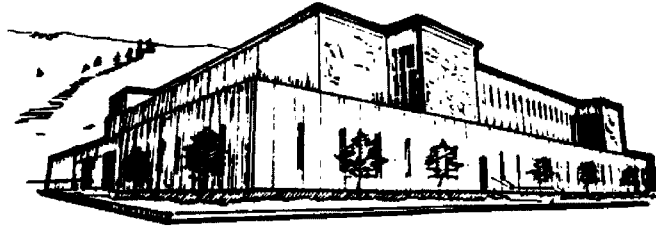
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University of
Montana

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE VIEWS AND QUALIFICATIONS
OF EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETERS FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED
IN FAIRFAX COUNTY IN VIRGINIA**

By

Mary Ann Duffy

B.A., Mary Washington College, 1985

M.C.S.D., University of Montana, 1990

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Communication Sciences and Disorders

University of Montana

1990

Approved by

Sally Jones, MA
Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dee Murray
Dean, Graduate School

April 27, 1990
Date

UMI Number: EP38575

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Chapter 1

Background Information

Educational interpreting for hearing-impaired students emerged into a profession as a result of mainstreaming hearing-impaired children into the public schools. The educational interpreter has the potential to facilitate communication between the regular classroom teacher and hearing-impaired student(s). Their responsibilities may include: interpreting (spoken English to sign language and the reverse); tutoring the student, including teaching vocabulary to the child; and regular listening checks of hearing aids and other listening devices. Educational interpreters have a tremendous influence over the hearing-impaired children for whom they interpret. However the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications of this profession are not uniform or clearly identified.

Legal History

Public Law 94-142 (The Education of All Handicapped Children Act) was passed in 1975. Public Law 94-142 included provisions for handicapped children to be provided with appropriate services specific to their individual needs within the least restrictive environment possible (Stuckless and Castle, 1979).

In 1973, prior to the enactment of Public Law 94-142, the Office of Demographic Studies reported that 10.6% of hearing impaired children were integrated with their hearing peers (Rittenhouse, 1987). Hurwitz (1979) reported this integration was most often in nonacademic subjects. A later study in 1979 revealed 37% of hearing impaired children were integrated to some extent (it was not specified whether academic or nonacademic subjects) with their hearing peers (Jordan, Gustason and Rosen, 1979). Rittenhouse (1987) indicated 49% of hearing impaired children were integrated into at least one academic class. These studies suggest that since the enactment of Public Law 94-142 there has been an increase in number of hearing impaired children mainstreamed, and these hearing impaired children are increasingly being mainstreamed into academic classes.

Although interpreters are not a required educational service for all hearing-impaired students, they are considered a necessity for many hearing-impaired children to benefit from educational mainstreaming. It has been reported that the influx of hearing-impaired children in the classroom might not have happened without interpreters (Zawolkow and Defiore, 1986).

Current Status

Two major problems with mainstreaming hearing-impaired

children in the public schools are: 1) the shortage of interpreters and 2) the lack of uniform national standards for interpreters (Steinberg, Tipton and Schein, 1973). The supply versus demand issue for educational interpreters was investigated by Rittenhouse (1987). This study reported that of the deaf students noted in the study to be mainstreamed (in at least one academic class) only 56% of these students were provided with an educational interpreter (Rittenhouse, 1987). Rittenhouse did not state what percentage of the students who did not receive interpreter services actually requested this service.

Because there are no national or state guidelines, the responsibilities and skill level of interpreters varies widely. The field of educational interpreting has been viewed by some educators and professional interpreters as a starting ground where interpreters can improve their sign language skills (Winston, 1985). On the other hand, many educational interpreters go through 2 year or 4 year training programs. A study by Gustason (1985) revealed 37% of individuals who graduated from interpreter training programs went into educational interpreting. However, even these specialized programs inadequately prepared their graduates for educational interpreting by offering limited or no training in the areas of tutoring skills, English based sign systems, or child development (Gustason, 1985).

Standards in Place

The National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certifies sign interpreters nationally. RID was established to meet the needs of deaf and hearing adults. RID certification requires the ability to interpret and transliterate adult level material at a high level of proficiency, using a pass/no pass criteria. There is presently no continuing education or periodic retesting of skill level. However, an Ad Hoc Committee, chaired by the president of RID, has been formed to discuss whether RID certification should require periodic retesting. RID seeks to maintain quality through a Code of Ethics.

The standards for RID certification are rigorous, designed for individuals who can fluently interpret for an adult population. Zawolkow and Defiore (1986) suggested that educational interpreters should not be expected to have the sign language expertise of a free lance interpreter for adults. At the same time, it is crucial that an interpreter have the skill necessary to meet the communication demands of the classroom.

The RID Code of Ethics does not address many ethical issues specific to educational interpreting (Avery, Hurwitz, and Stuckless, 1989). For example, the RID Code of Ethics portrays the interpreter as "a neutral conduit of information,

a reflector who conveys information between deaf and hearing individuals" (Moore, 1984). One RID bylaw states, "individual transliterators shall not counsel, advise, or interject personal opinions" (Registry of Certified Interpreters, 1988). However, educational interpreters are often put into the position where they need to counsel or provide explanation, such as providing definitions for unfamiliar vocabulary or idioms. In addition, the RID Code of Ethics does not cover issues pertinent to educational interpreting such as performing the duties of a tutor or an aide (Moore, 1984).

National Task Force on Educational Interpreting

To address the concerns about the state of educational interpreting, the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting was formed in 1985 by professionals, parents, and other concerned individuals. The Task Force was coordinated by individuals at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). The Task Force met over a period of four years and put together a report which proposed guidelines for roles and responsibilities, hiring, working conditions, preparation and certification of educational interpreters. (Avery et al., 1989).

The Task Force recommended that educational interpreters receive formal training in an interpreter's training program.

This recommendation was made to address the shortage of qualified individuals entering the field. This proposed training would include theoretical knowledge about hearing impairment, assistive listening devices, deaf culture, and instructional techniques for educating the hearing-impaired. It was noted that no single training program adequately prepared educational interpreters and thus work experience would be valuable before certification. The Task Force also recommended that educational interpreters acquire conversational skills at a high level of proficiency in several modes of manual communication : American Sign Language (ASL), Pidgin Sign English (PSE), and some form of Manually Coded English (MCE). It was noted that interpreters need to sign in more than one mode to adapt to the needs of the children for whom they are interpreting. However, the Task Force Report stated that it is the responsibility of the local educational authority to choose the type of sign language to be used with each deaf student. Finally, the Task Force recommended that RID and CED (Certification of Educators of the Deaf) set standards for certification of educational interpreters and encourage adoption of these standards at national and state levels. It was also suggested that there be several levels of certification depending on the age and grade level of children for whom an educational interpreter interprets. Once established, certification standards could

be used to design course curricula for educational interpreters.

Purpose of the Study

Certification of educational interpreters can not be immediately instituted according to The Task Force recommendations due to a number of changes which need to be made within the profession. These changes include: instituting courses in the curricula of interpreter training programs to better meet the needs of an educational setting; attracting qualified individuals into educational interpreting by offering competitive salaries and benefits; and offering in-service training in ASL and other areas to interpreters currently employed. Less stringent certification requirements can be implemented by states and then modified as interpreting programs improve the quality of their preparation. In addition, standards should and can be adopted immediately for interpreters by the educational institutions which hire them.

This study investigated the current training and certification of educational interpreters for the hearing-impaired in an urban community, Fairfax County in Virginia, which is located close to Gallaudet University and many other resources for the deaf. The purpose was to assess educational interpreters' perceptions regarding their own qualifications to practice in their field. Another purpose was to determine whether

currently practicing interpreters would meet proposed standards and whether they would favor a move toward state and/or national certification.

Chapter 2

Methods:

A survey was developed with a total of 15 multiple choice and yes/no questions to be filled out by all of the 20 educational interpreters employed by Fairfax County Public Schools. The questions were employed to obtain information about a number of issues related to educational interpreting such as: skill level, modes of manual communication used when interpreting, and beliefs about certification. See survey and instructions in Appendix A.

Twenty surveys were sent to the Principal of Hearing Impaired Services in Fairfax County in Virginia, Carol McBride, and were distributed by the head interpreter for the County, Randy Smith. Surveys were sent to the 20 educational interpreters through the Fairfax County School's internal mail system and interpreters were asked to return their surveys through the internal mail system to Randy Smith.

Subjects

The educational interpreters surveyed were full or part-time employees of the Fairfax County School System. Employment qualifications for these positions included: preferred college degree or four years equivalent experience in working with the hearing impaired, ability to sign forms of manual English and/or Cued Speech, and familiarity with RID Code of Ethics

and the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Requirements. The school system sign language requirement stated that an English based sign system be used first followed by whatever manual communication approach will get message across (e.g., ASL, finger spelling, rephrasing, etc...)(Carol McBride, personal communication, January 16, 1990). The employees' interpreting skills were not assessed directly but individuals for whom the applicant had interpreted were contacted and questioned about the applicant's interpreting skill level.

Chapter 3

Results:

Responses were received from 55% (11 of 20) of the educational interpreters surveyed. Results are reported in percentages, therefore 9% is equal to one person.

Sign Language Skills. When the respondents were asked to describe their sign language skills: 27% reported they were completely fluent; 63% reported being fluent in the setting in which they worked; 45% reported adequate skills but continually needed to look up new signs; 9% indicated they had skills which were sufficient to get message across but needed to work on sign fluency and vocabulary development.

Acquisition of Sign Language Skills. In response to a question about how they acquired sign language skills: 63% took adult education course(s); 72% took university course(s); 36% reported course(s) in interpreter training program; 18% learned sign language from deaf relative(s); 54% learned sign language from deaf friend(s); and 27% indicated other sources of sign language training. The majority of interpreters (63%), indicated learning sign language from at least three sources.

Length of Sign Language Use. Responding to a question about length of sign language use: 72% signified using sign

language for five or more years, 18% for 3 to 4 years, and 9% (1 individual) for 2 years.

Sign System Use. When asked to indicate which sign language systems they used when interpreting, 36% stated American Sign Language (ASL); 54% reported using Signed English (SE); 54% indicated using Signing Exact English (SEE); and 81% reported using Pidgin English (PE). When questioned whether they interpreted for individuals whose native language is ASL, 72% stated they did and 27% indicated they did not. In response to why the interpreters choose a particular sign system for interpreting: 72% indicated basing choice on school system requirement; 63% on the sign system of the child; 18% for philosophical reasons; 9% other (the sign system known).

Registry of Interpreter's for the Deaf (RID) Certification. None of the interpreters stated they were certified with RID.

Background Knowledge. In response to a question about the interpreter's theoretical knowledge of hearing impaired children and sign language prior to becoming to an interpreter, 36% had knowledge about basic audiological information on hearing loss and how to test hearing aids and/or auditory trainers; 81% indicated knowledge about deaf culture and the ability to sign in more than one form of manual communication; and 45% signified knowledge of

instructional techniques used for serving as an aide or tutor for deaf children. Two individuals indicated knowledge in all areas assessed.

Age groups in which qualified to interpret. When questioned about which age groups they were qualified to interpret: 100% responded preschool through 4th grade; 90% 5th grade through junior high; 81% high school; and 54% college and beyond.

Age groups for which interpret. In regard to a question concerning the age groups for which they interpreted: 36% indicated preschool; 54% 1st and 2nd grades; 45% 3rd and 4th grades; 27% 5th and 6th grades; 45% junior high; 72% high school; and 36% college and beyond.

Interpreter role. When asked about their role as an interpreter in the public schools: 100% stated they interpreted; 36% functioned as a tutor/aide for hearing impaired students, and 9% (1 person) functioned as a tutor/aide for hearing students; 45% of the respondents functioned in the capacity of keeping the classroom teacher informed of problems a hearing-impaired child may be having; 63% regularly interacted with other specialists concerning a particular hearing-impaired child; and 9% (1 person) checked hearing aid batteries and/or auditory trainers.

Assistance in Sign Language Skills. When asked what preparation is provided to students who demonstrate poor sign language skills: 27% indicated individual instruction in sign language at the beginning of the year; 45% indicated signs were learned from the lesson with additional tutoring for clarification; 50% presented new signs prior to every lesson; 27% stated question was not applicable; and 18% responded that no special preparation was given to these children.

Classroom preparation with teacher. When asked whether they had a designated time to meet with teachers regarding lessons: 54% of the educational interpreters responded that they had a designated time, or spent a certain amount of time during the week; and 45% indicated no designated time.

Certification. In response to a question about certification of educational interpreters: 36% believed there should be national certification and 63% believed state certification was appropriate. Four individuals (36%) thought there should be national and state certification. Of those interpreters in favor of certification, 36% thought there should be several levels of certification based on grade level. Eighteen percent thought certification is not necessary but interpreters skills should be assessed periodically by native signers. No one responded to the following two options: 1) state certification isn't necessary, however, a guideline of

minimal qualifications should be enforced and 2) there should be increased training but certification is not necessary.

The majority of interpreters perceived their skill level to be at least adequate. The majority (72%) of interpreters based the sign system they used on school system requirement. The local school system requirement stated the preference for the use of an English based system first, then, if this method failed, the use of any other sign system that will get the message across (Carol McBride, personal communication, January 16, 1990). The 27% who did not base their sign system on school system requirement stated they only interpreted in Pidgin Sign Language.

All interpreters surveyed stated they were qualified for the age group for which they interpreted. Of the four individuals who stated functioning as aide or tutor as part of their role, only two stated knowledge of tutoring techniques prior to becoming an interpreter.

Chapter 4

Discussion:

Due to the small number of responses received the data collected from these surveys may not be a representative sample of qualifications and beliefs of educational interpreters in Fairfax County in Virginia or elsewhere. However, the results obtained provided a basic insight into beliefs and qualifications of a group of educational interpreters.

This study attempted to examine interpreters' perceptions of their skill levels and beliefs in order to determine the feasibility for certification. It was discovered after the administration of this survey that Virginia state certification of educational interpreters has been developed. This certification process involves taking a written assessment focusing on questions pertaining to ethics and a performance test which is taken six months after successfully receiving a score of 90% on the written section. The written section was administered in the Winter, 1990 and the performance test will be administered in the Spring, 1990 (Kathy Vidito, personal communication, April 5, 1990).

The majority of the interpreters (81%) were in favor of either national and/or state certification. This suggested the desire for raising the standards and quality of the

profession; as one interpreter commented, " state certification is important for the quality and professional pride of the educational interpreter." Even those individuals opposed to certification were in favor of some type of quality control which entailed assessment of interpreters' skills periodically by native signers.

Eighty-one percent surveyed stated complete fluency or that they were fluent in the setting in which they worked. However, only one of four individuals who stated they interpreted in ASL was fluent in this mode. In addition, 54% of the interpreters indicated continually learning new signs to stay ahead of the needs of their children. This may or may not be considered an inconsistency. For an interpreter to continually look up new signs may not imply poor sign language skills considering subject matter in the classroom is continually changing. However, continually needing to look up new signs could imply a lack of proficiency. Of particular interest, two of the interpreters who commented needing to continually learn new signs stated they had no designated time to meet with teachers about lessons. This leads one to question whether these interpreters were prepared to meet communication demands in the classroom. These inconsistent results could be real or could be related to difficulty in obtaining precise information from all possible permutations of results from a multiple choice question.

The results suggested that few of the interpreters surveyed meet even some of the Task Force recommendations for preparation leading to certification. Of the interpreters surveyed, 27% met the Task Force requirement of fluency in 3 modes of manual communication which include: ASL, PSE, and MCE and 63% stated fluency in at least PSE and MCE.

The Task Force recommended that interpreters receive training from an interpreter training program. The survey did not directly ask about general or overall educational preparation of the educational interpreter. However, it was indicated that four individuals took sign language in an interpreter's training program. The Task Force recommended that an interpreter's training would include knowledge about hearing impairment, assistive listening devices, deaf culture, and techniques used in educating the hearing-impaired. Only 36% had knowledge about hearing loss and assistive listening devices. However, a majority, (81%) indicated knowledge about deaf culture. Another Task Force recommendation relating to knowledge about instructional techniques used for educating the hearing-impaired was not addressed in this survey.

Some additional questions which would provide useful information for further surveys would include: interpreter's impressions about their work load and the supply versus demand of educational interpreters; educational interpreters'

impressions and qualifications regarding the impending Virginia state certification; and how interpreters' saw their roles and responsibilities.

To conclude, the majority of educational interpreters surveyed assessed their sign language skills to be adequate in at least one mode of manual communication. Some questions arose as to the consistency of these results since some educational interpreters indicated they were fluent in sign language and yet also indicated the need to continually look up new signs. Their background in ASL and knowledge about hearing-impairment was typically weak. Three-fourths of the individuals who interpreted in ASL did not indicate fluency in this mode. However, all of the interpreters were in favor of some type of quality control for monitoring sign language skills and most were in favor of certification.

Appendix A

EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETER SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS: Please circle as many responses as appropriate.

1) Describe your sign language skills:

- a) completely fluent as a first or second language.
- b) fluent in the setting in which I work.
- c) adequate sign language skills for the children I interpret for, but am continually learning new signs to try to stay ahead of the educational needs of these children.
- d) sign skills sufficient to get message across but I need to work on my sign language fluency and vocabulary development.

2) How did you learn sign language?

- a) adult education course(s). How many? _____
- b) university course(s). How many? _____
- c) interpreter's training program at a university. Please list _____
- d) hearing impaired or deaf relative. Amount of exposure to sign language? _____
- e) hearing impaired or deaf friend. Amount of exposure to sign language? _____
- f) other (please specify) _____

3) How long have you been using sign language?

- a) 1 year
- b) 2 years
- c) 3 to 4 years
- d) 5 years or more

4) Which sign systems do you interpret in?

- a) American Sign Language (ASL)
- b) Signed English (SE)
- c) Signing Exact English (SEE)
- d) Pidgin English (PE)

5) Which sign language systems are you fluent in?

- a) American Sign Language (ASL)
- b) Signed English (SE)
- c) Signing Exact English (SEE)
- d) Pidgin English (PE)

6) Do you interpret for students whose native language is ASL?

- a) yes, what percentage? _____
- b) no

7) Are you certified with the Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf (RID)?

- a) yes
- b) no

8) What knowledge did you have about hearing impaired children and sign language prior to becoming an interpreter?

- a) basic audiological information on hearing loss.
 - b) information on how to test hearing aids and/or auditory trainers.
 - c) information on deaf culture.
 - d) the ability to sign, at a basic level, in more than one sign system.
 - e) basic knowledge about instructional techniques for serving as an aid or tutor for hearing impaired children.
 - f) other, please specify
-

9) Which age groups are you adequately qualified to interpret for?

- a) preschool
- b) 1st and 2nd grades
- c) 3rd and 4th grades
- d) 5th and 6th grades
- e) junior high
- f) high school
- g) college and beyond

10) Which age groups do you interpret for?

- a) preschool
- b) 1st and 2nd grades
- c) 3rd and 4th grades
- d) 5th and 6th grades
- e) junior high
- f) high school
- g) college and beyond

11) Why do you use the particular sign systems you interpret in?

- a) philosophical reasons.
- b) school system requirement.
- c) sign system of child.
- d) other _____

12) What is/are your role(s) as an interpreter in the Public Schools?

- a) interpreter.
- b) tutor/aide for hearing-impaired students.
- c) tutor/aide for normal hearing students.
- d) inform classroom teacher about problems hearing-impaired student is having.
- e) interact regularly with other specialists (e.g., resource room teacher, speech pathologist, etc..) about hearing-impaired child.
- f) check hearing aid batteries and/or auditory trainer.

13) What preparation is provided to students who demonstrate poor sign language skills?

- a) individual instruction in sign language at the beginning of the school year.
- b) learning sign language from the lesson with additional tutoring for clarification.
- c) presentation of new signs prior to every lesson.
- d) not applicable.
- e) other _____

14) Do you have a designated time during the day when you can prepare for lessons and meet with teachers regarding lessons?

- a) yes, how much time per day? _____
- b) no

15) Which of the following describes your beliefs about certification for educational interpreters?

- a) I believe there should be national certification.
- b) I believe there should be state certification.
- c) I believe there should be several levels of certification based on grade level.
- d) I believe there should be increased training for educational interpreters but certification is not necessary.
- e) I believe certification is not necessary, but interpreters' skills should be assessed periodically by native signers.

f) I believe state certification isn't necessary, however, a guideline of minimal qualifications should be enforced.

g) other _____

COMMENTS:

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